

up what sounds like the usual fare: passive smoking is not a problem, just a scientific mistake, because epidemiologists do not control for confounding variables; advertising and other marketing activities are targeted only to adults, to make them change brands; and of course, nicotine is not addictive. To the surprise of some journalists present, BAT appealed for media support in Latin America.

Sweet talk in India

Indian news media were full of coverage earlier this year of a worrying new health trend, the increasing consumption of *pan masala* and *gutkha*, varieties of chewing tobacco. What fuelled the row was a statement by a prestigious committee appointed by a court to examine the health consequences of these and other oral tobacco products. Despite being led by the director of health services and having several eminent scientists on it, the committee appeared to ignore the conclusions of a plethora of incriminating research by bodies such as the renowned Tata Memorial Institute in Bombay, and stated that there was no "direct correlation" between cancer and the consumption of chewing tobacco and *pan masala*. Fortunately, completing the bizarre role reversal of comparable episodes in the West (such as admissions by Bennett LeBow, head of the Liggett Group in the United States), a leading manufacturer stepped in to save the day for health. MM Kothari, whose firm makes India's best-selling brand of smokeless tobacco, and father of the modern *pan masala* industry (barely two to three decades old), said: "Anything taken in excess is harmful, even *gulab jamuns* (a popular Indian sweetmeat) and chocolates." Freely admitting that *gutkha* was harmful, he added: "We have no objection to a ban, but then the government must stop cigarettes too." Perhaps he should join the committee.

Philip Morris goes nuts in Brazil

It is now abundantly clear from leaked tobacco industry documents that cigarette makers, knowing that their future depends on recruiting children as customers, have actively pursued this goal. Yet only in August, Philip Morris (PM) threw its considerable weight behind a new regulation passed in the Federal District of Brazil (the country's capital, Brasilia), which prohibits sales to children under 18 years of age. PM is distributing its

material among schools and at points of sale in Brasilia, and intends to extend the campaign throughout the country, apparently in anticipation of similar regulations being approved in other states. The industry's penchant for supporting such programmes, knowing them to add "forbidden fruit" associations to the image of their addictive and deadly products, is well known, but even so, local health workers were shocked by the messages in the PM materials. For instance, one poster printed in black, yellow, and red, and stating that cigarettes could only be bought by those aged 18 and older, had a striking red stamp in the middle, reading: "This is legal!" The Portuguese word for "legal" has two meanings, of which the slang interpretation, familiar to children, is to be "cool". Another poster reiterated the industry's familiar rallying call that smoking is an adult decision. The Portuguese word for "adult" also has a double meaning, once again likely to be especially familiar to adolescents: apart from its straight meaning, it also means "mature". To add insult to injury, the company sent details of its campaign to the head of Brazil's National Cancer Institute.

US women: smoking defenders, not cigarettes

The American women struck gold at the 1996 Olympics, and in 1997 took their Smoke-Free Kids programme on a nine-state victory celebration of the United States. The tour set attend-

ance records for women's soccer in the United States. Fans and the opposing teams were dazzled by the display of goal scoring and tenacious defence from the American champions.

While France, South Korea, England, Australia, Canada and Italy fell to the Americans, the real winners were the thousands of children who saw the team play, in person or during several nationally televised broadcasts.

Soccer fans were given copies of the 1997 SmokeFree Kids (SFKids) poster featuring United States team captain Julie Foudy. "Keep your engine running clean" is the theme of the 1997 campaign. In addition, two Smoke-Free Computer Screensavers were released as giveaway items on the SFKids interactive web site. Stadium fans and the television audience were reminded about the association of soccer and Smoke-Free Kids with field boards prominently displayed alongside commercial sponsors Nike and Snickers. Local tobacco control activists from the National Cancer Institute's ASSIST (American Stop Smoking Intervention Study) programme, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's IMPACT programme, state health departments, and the American Cancer Society, greeted fans at the stadiums with "SmokeFree" giveaway items and shared enthusiasm for the world's most popular sport.

As described in earlier issues of *Tobacco Control* (1996;5:105-6, 188), the United States national women's soccer team has teamed up with



United States midfielder Kristine Lilly weaves through the English defence. The American women prevailed 6-0 before a sold-out stadium in Portland, Oregon on 11 May 1997. (Photo credit: M Stahlschmidt/SSP)